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# MOJO

*The Music Magazine*

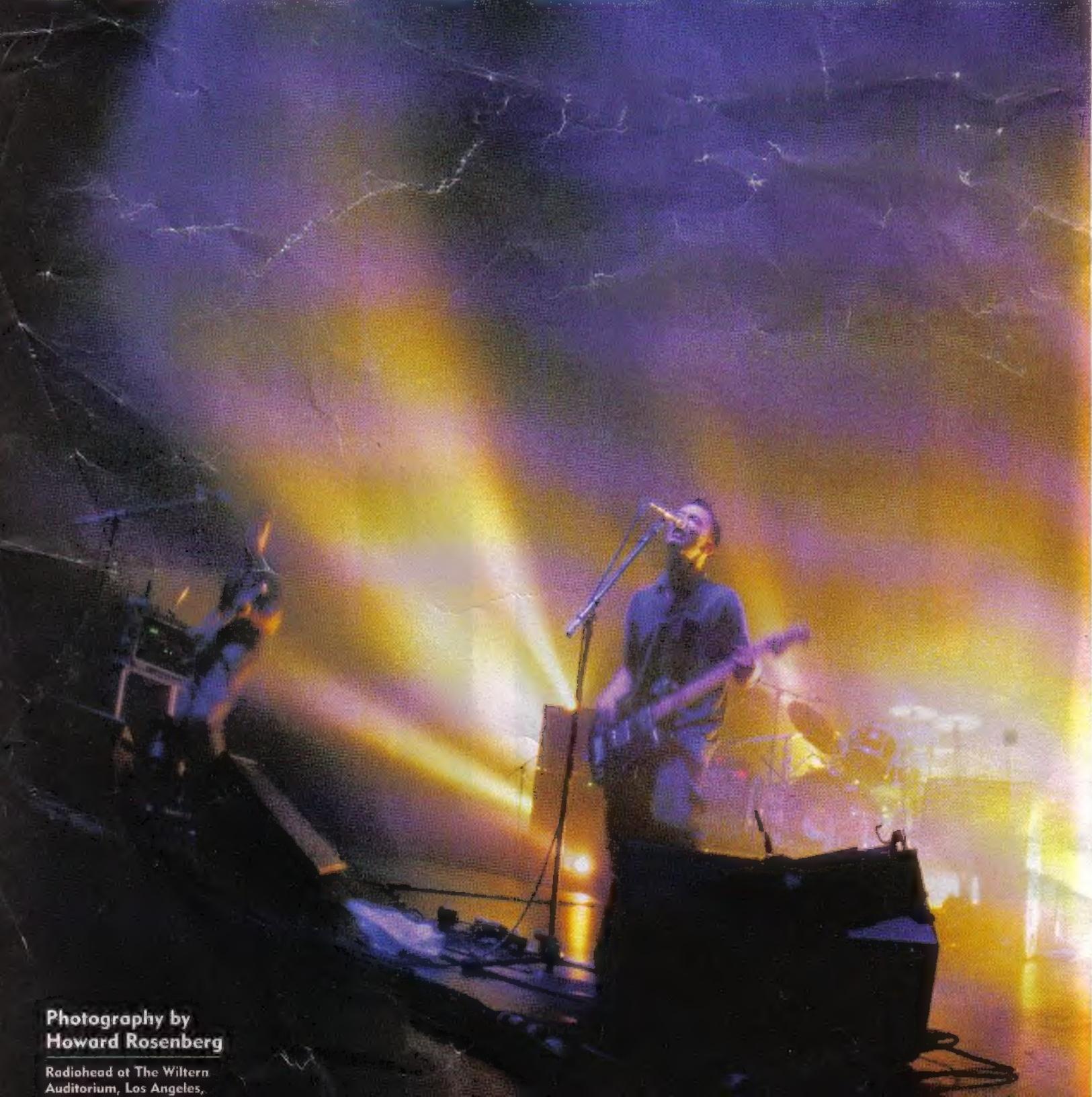


# radiohead

The inside story  
of rock's

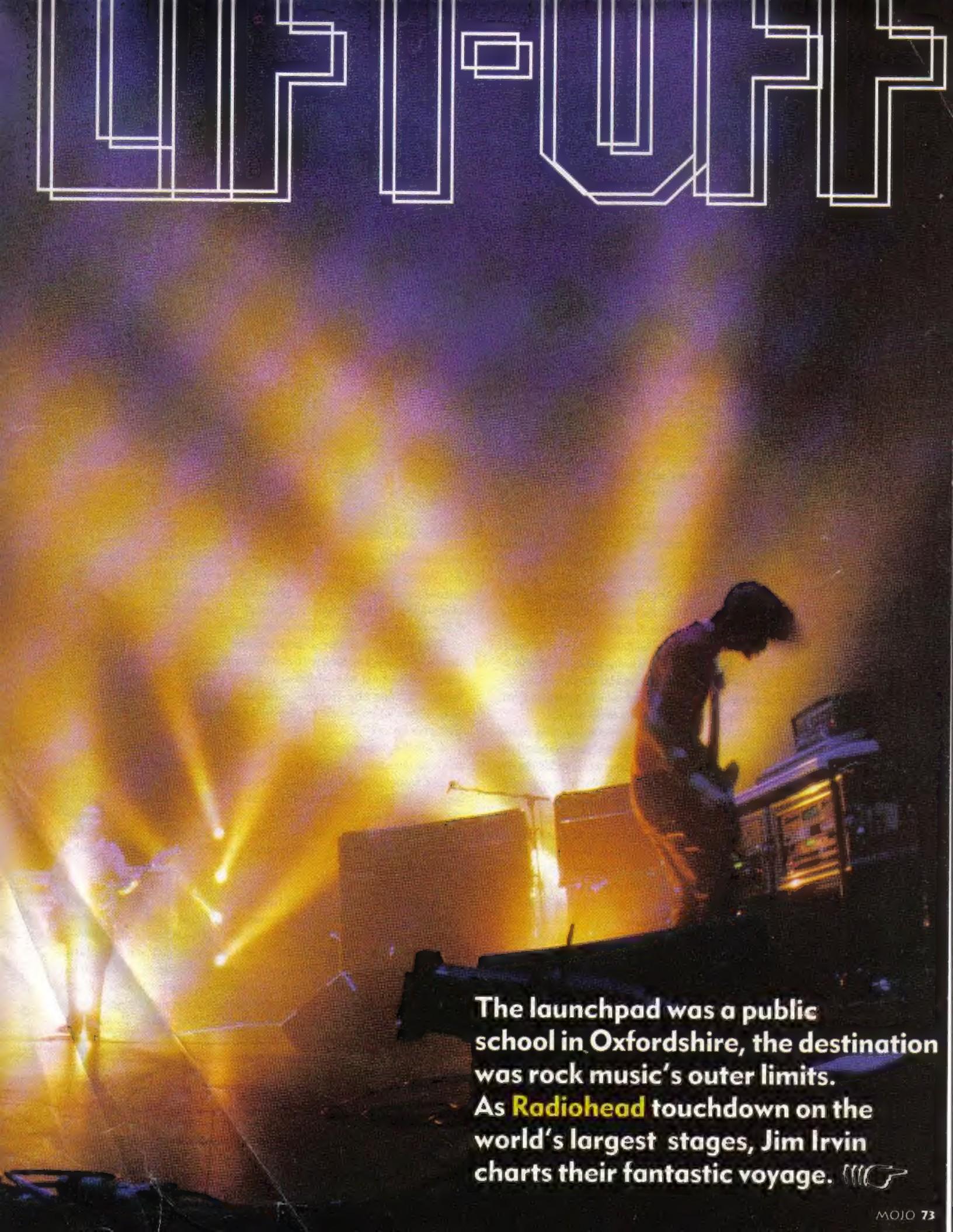
Oasis LP

# WAVE



Photography by  
Howard Rosenberg

Radiohead at The Wiltern  
Auditorium, Los Angeles.



The launchpad was a public school in Oxfordshire, the destination was rock music's outer limits. As **Radiohead** touchdown on the world's largest stages, Jim Irvin charts their fantastic voyage.



FEBRUARY 1992. THE MELODY Maker's young Oxford correspondent pops up Cowley Road to the old Co-Op dining hall, a glamour-free venue

— small stage at one end, Formica-topped table with a barrel of Red Stripe clamped to it at the other — where

The Candyskins are headlining with support from another local bunch with the unappetising name On A Friday. In the following week's paper he'll write of the latter: "Terrible name. Apt for beer-gutted pub-rockers, but ill-suited to the astonishing intensity of this bunch. On A Friday swing between uneasy calm and crazed desperation, hinting at extremes that belie their moniker... They leave us with a speeding hymn to megalomania entitled Nothing Touches Me — a perfect example of their manic melodic charms, and an indication of credible self-confidence. 'Promising' seems something of an understatement." The writer was student John Harris (these days the editor of Select magazine) and the band, newly signed to EMI, were about to take his advice and change their name...

It's Thursday May 22, 1997, a searing summer's day in the Catalonian capital. Three things are creating a buzz in Barcelona this morning: the pavements are sprouting strange kiosks for some Spanish business festival, students are marching in protest down Las Ramblas, and a top pop group are in town for the launch of their third album. Los Radiohead have been here since Monday, following warm-up shows in Lisbon, Portugal. They spent yesterday talking to press and TV insects swarming here from all over the globe and tonight, at the modest Zeliste Club, they'll perform for the official European unveiling of the masterful *OK Computer*.

Thom Yorke is in the foyer of the Hotel Condes des Barcelona. He's dressed as an affluent tourist from Ursa Major: shiny slate-coloured zip-up top, rucksack, baggy trouserings in some unnameable man-made fabric, and huge hi-tech trainers that look as if he's stepped into a couple of hovercrafts. He's with his close friend Dan, the man responsible for all Radiohead's artwork, and is due any minute at an Internet press-conference linking Australasia, South America and Dubai. In the meantime, MOJO asks a stupid question: Why Barcelona? A single Yorke eyebrow is raised above his yellow shades, "Why do you fucking think?" it says, though its owner remains silent.

The virtual chinwag is a wash-out. The system crashes within minutes. All the band except Thom are ushered on to an MTV interview. The Radiohead juggernaut is going gently into overdrive and the world's media are queuing up to throw themselves in its path. This is the story of its journey from the Oxfordshire countryside to the world's largest stages by the people in the engine room. Cue the wobbly screen and let's flashback...

Above left, On A Friday, 1992 (clockwise from top left) Colin Greenwood, Jonny Greenwood, Ed O'Brien, Thom E. Yorke and Phil Selway. Above, the moodier 1993 Radiohead and (far right) in LA, July 26, 1997.

THOM E. YORKE (AS HE WAS BILLED EARLY on) was born October 7, 1968. By the time he arrived at Abingdon public school he was already the veteran of a pre-pubescent art-pop duo (Thom on guitar, friend demolishing televisions). At a sagely 14, Yorke, who says he spent most of his free time secreted in the school's soundproofed music rooms, began singing ("because no-one else would") in the school punk band TNT, where his contemporary Colin Greenwood also threw a few shapes.

When TNT imploded, Thom offered Colin the chance to play bass in a band he was forming with the tall, handsome chap in the year above who looked a bit like Morrissey: Ed O'Brien. A sixth-former, who looked nothing like Morrissey but had a drum kit, was also asked to join. Thom's first words to Phil Selway were momentous: "Can't you play a bit faster?"

Colin's brother Jonny wanted in too. The kind of musical genius who can get a tune out of a cheese roll, he was still only a third year. And an oik from the third can crimp a fourth-former's cool, as any fulle kno. So it was a four and a half man line-up of On A Friday which debuted at Oxford's Jericho Tavern as early as 1987. (Jonny hanging about with his harmonica just in case.) But any serious tilt at stardom was to be forestalled by largely unenthusiastic parents and the call of further education.

MEANWHILE, IN THE VILLAGE OF SUTTON COURTEENAY, near Abingdon, Courtyard Studios was coming down around the owners' ears. In their mid-thirties in 1987, two former members of a band called Aerial FX, Chris Huxford (guitar, bass, vocals) and Bryce Edge (keyboards) became part of a partnership running an ambitious complex of hi-tech business units and matching houses designed to bring IT-age living to Oxfordshire almost a decade before it became fashionable or, indeed, totally feasible. At its core was a recording studio. By 1990 the project was in serious trouble and the studio was running at a loss. When the partnership crumbled, Chris and Bryce managed to rent the purpose-built studio space from the new owners. A long session with local band Slowdive saved the business and they began to hatch plans for a production company.

One afternoon, a young man named John Butcher, a close friend of Chris's assistant, came into Courtyard with a demo tape. It was the complete works of a band which featured two of Butcher's classmates, Thom Yorke and Colin Greenwood. "You couldn't hear any one band on it,"

Hufford says now of his first taste of On A Friday. "There were some good tunes but it was all obviously ripped off mercilessly." He might have ignored it were it not for the 15th track. "It was a weird looped-up dance thing which was completely mental but had something about it that was very different. I asked if they had anything else. After about six months John brought in another tape with Stop Whispering and What's That You Say on it. These were great songs. Now they had an identity."

That summer of 1991 the band had finished university but for Jonny, who was just about to start a psychology course at Oxford Poly. The time seemed right to see if they could take On A Friday any further. When Hufford expressed interest in the new tape they invited him to a gig at the Jericho Tavern. John Harris recalls Oxford's musical community of the time: "It was a funny scene, very separate from the university – bands like Ride, Slowdive, Swervedriver and 5.30 – and centred around the Jericho, a record shop called Manic Hedgehog and a magazine called Curfew, which put On A Friday on the cover very early on. There was a pub called The New Inn on the Cowley Road where bands swapped tips and so on." Harris had been aware of On A Friday long before he actually saw them. "There's always someone in a band that takes on a quasi-managerial role and for them it was Ed. He sent me a couple of letters – on On A Friday notepaper – saying 'I'm in this group, come and see us.' To be honest, I ignored them."

Hufford, however, turned up. "I was completely and utterly blown away. Out of all those Thames Valley bands of the time there were no performers or great singers but Thom was incredible. Brilliant songs with the amazing power of the three guitars. I made a complete buffoon of myself, bursting backstage saying, I've got to work with you! I was so excited by them. They had fantastic energy. I could see it on a world level, even then."

MEANWHILE, A FORMER MUSICIAN from Gloucester was coming to the end of his time as a sales rep for EMI records. Keith Wozencroft had just been offered a job in A&R at Parlophone. On his farewell visit to the Oxford branch of Our Price he told the personable young man named Colin behind the counter of his new post. "You should sign my band," said Colin Greenwood, handing him On A Friday's demo. Struck by the tape's diversity and the singing, Wozencroft went to see the band at an open-air gig in an Oxford park. "There was no-one there in this little tent apart from a couple of their girlfriends. But they played really well. I left a message with the sound guy that it was great and kept in touch over the next few months."

A booker at Bath Moles Club, Jan Brown, sent the same tape to an agent, Charlie Myatt at ITB in London, recommending the band to him. "I went and visited them in some sort of cowshed," says Myatt. "I was very impressed by their intelligence and started to get them gigs."

On A Friday were the first thing Keith Wozencroft took into his boss, EMI A&R director (and former sax player with Dexy's Midnight ►►

"OUT OF ALL THOSE OXFORD BANDS, THERE WERE NO PERFORMERS OR GREAT SONGS. BUT THOM WAS INCREDIBLE. BRILLIANT SONGS WITH THE AMAZING POWER OF THE THREE GUITARS. I COULD SEE IT ON A WORLD LEVEL, EVEN THEN."

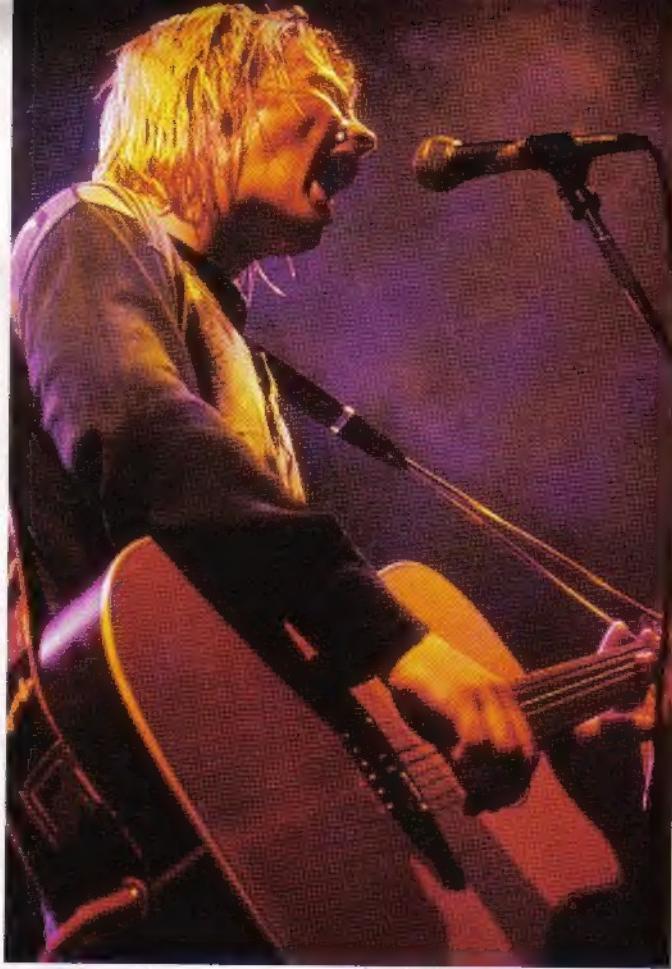


↳ Runners), Nick Gatfield. Having once been signed to EMI themselves, Chris and Bryce also had contacts at the label. When the full EMI team finally turned up to a Jericho Tavern show, almost every major label was present.

"Because I was new to the role it never occurred to me that the band might go with anyone else," recalls Wozencroft, who took on direct responsibility for the band. "Gatfield put a good offer in straight away and it was fine. We didn't mess around." On A Friday had a deal. They were on the same label as The Beatles.

THOUGH THEY'D INTENDED to be a production team, it seemed only logical that Chris Hufford and Bryce Edge should become the band's managers. "Management had never been an ambition," laughs Hufford. "We'd always thought managers were complete tossers. But we'd learnt a lot. We thought, Let's be management where you put yourself in the artist's shoes. We were naive about a lot of the business but we totally believed in the band."

A newly-appointed press officer (the late Philip Hall) finally persuaded John Harris to make the trip to The Venue and review the show. "News of their signing had spread and there was a real sense of expectation," recalls Harris. In the set at that time were Prove Yourself, Thinking About You, and I Can't – which would all surface on *Pablo Honey* – and a tune glorying in the title Phillipa Chicken. Though he submitted a positive review, Harris wasn't wholly impressed. "They looked awful. Thom was wearing a brown crew-necked jumper, had cropped hair and looked very small, with none of the presence he has now. Musically they were all over the place. They started with something Rickenbackery that sounded like *All Mod Cons*-period Jam, then they'd flip it with something that sounded like the Pixies. All the raw material was there but they hadn't found their feet stylistically. Remember, the context at that time was all shoegazing or



**Thom Yorke during the Creep hair-crisis.** "They were finding the process alien to them," says their agent.

fraggle – so a band who wrote songs like Stop Whispering, compared to Slowdive or Mega City Four sounded like the work of God."

The review prompted discussion in the band. On A Friday had been chosen when they were a weekend outfit of jamming schoolboys. Now they had to concede that the critic had a point: their name was, at best, mundane. They decided to swap it for the title of a cod-reggae tune on Talking Heads' *True Stories* album, Radio Head.

The band's relationship with their management was immediately put under strain. The debut release was an EP produced by Chris and Bryce. "Not a clever move," admits Chris. "A huge conflict of interests. I think Thom was very unsure of my involvement. I'd had that happen to me as an artist when one of our managers acted as producer – it was fine until we wanted to develop and move on – so I was acutely aware of what he was feeling, but I can be

quite overbearing and opinionated in the studio. There was definitely some friction on that front. Otherwise, it was a treat, we fired out the songs." The 4-track *Drill* EP came out in March 1992 with Prove Yourself as the lead track. It reached 101 in the UK singles chart. It was time to find new producers.

Boston-based production team Paul Q Kolderie and Sean Slade were in the UK touting for business after Buffalo Tom's excellent *Let Me Come Over* album. Nick Gatfield liked the sounds they'd been getting and played them Stop Whispering. They were impressed. The band admired their work in return, and Kolderie and Slade were hired to produce two songs for the next single, Inside My Head and Lurgee.

"My first impression was that they were desperately inexperienced," remembers Kolderie of the rehearsals. "The other was that we didn't

# LIFE LINES OF RADIOHEAD

**"By the way, which one's Pink?"**  
An at-a-glance guide to birthdays, musical taste and soundbites...



**Full Name:**  
Thomas Edward Yorke

**Date Of Birth:**  
October 7, 1968

**Instrument:**  
Guitar, vocals, keyboards

**Education:** Abingdon School; studied English and art at Exeter University

**Previous bands/jobs:** played

guitar in Exeter techno band Flickemoise; worked as an orderly in a mental hospital.

**Five key words:**  
Creative, guarded, sarky, moody, hyperactive.

**Favourite music:**  
(Past influences) Elvis Costello, Scott Walker, Japan, R.E.M., Throwing Muses, Joy Division; (Current faves) P.J. Harvey, Faust, Can, Prince Buster, DJ Shadow, Laika.

**The Verve, Penderecki.**

**Notes:** During his first year at Exeter University he sported a long coat and a trilby hat; Steptoe & The Bummen chic. Still likes clothes. Changes his hairstyle more often and more radically than the others. Writes the bulk of the songs which band then arrange and mutate. Drives a Fiat Punto. Mates with Michael Stipe.

**Stuff he's said:** "I'm a control freak." "I can't delegate. I don't care what anybody says about burning myself out because I just feel like I have to do all this stuff, it's too important." "Exit Music was the first performance that we recorded where every note of it makes me really happy." "Being in a band turns you into a child and keeps you there." "It's a fine line between writing something with genuine emotional

impact and turning into little idiots feeling sorry for ourselves and playing stadium rock." "The others were all brought up to be polite. I wasn't."

**What the others have said about him:** "He's very quiet. He can get tense very quickly. He's moody and childish and aloof but he can also be very affectionate and friendly." (Jonny) "If he has a day off he'll spend it shopping." (Jonny)

**Full Name:**  
Edward John O'Brien

**Date Of Birth:**  
April 15, 1968

**Instruments:**  
Guitar, percussion, vocals

**Education:** Abingdon School; studied economics at Manchester University

**Previous jobs:** Barman

**Five key words:** Tall, dark, handsome, riffs, spliffs.

**Favourite music:** (Previous influences) Beatles, Dinosaur Jr, Joy Division, Happy Mondays, Smiths, NWA. (Current faves) Mansun, ROC, The Verve, Moloko.

**Notes:** Ed's dad is well-known as a keen follower of the band's fortunes and pop in general. "His dad will come in waving the music papers and want to discuss the new Primal Scream single," says Colin. Ed has now moved into his own place.

**What the others have said about him:** "The worst thing about Ed is his sleepwalking. Once, when he was sharing a room with Jonny, he started shouting, 'Fuck off, fuck off.' in his sleep. It was 5am, but Jonny actually apologised and left." (Colin)

like these songs Parlophone had chosen, and I don't think the band liked them much either. Inside My Head was not very melodic, didn't have any of the stuff we thought the others had, so we were rather disappointed. And then one day in rehearsal, they burst into this other song, which I guess they'd just written. When they finished it, Thom mumbled something like, 'That's our Scott Walker song'...except I thought he said, 'That's a Scott Walker song.' Now I was pretty familiar with Scott Walker, but Jeez, there's a lot of albums and I could have missed something! We walked out of the rehearsal that night and Sean said, 'Too bad their best song's a cover'."

That song was Creep.

**IF YOU GO UP THE WOODSTOCK ROAD IN OXFORD AND TURN LEFT YOU'RE ON Little Clarendon Street. "That's Oxford's Kensington," says John Harris, "all tapas bars and Dome Cafés." Turn right at the same junction and you hit Jericho, an altogether funkier thoroughfare. "The whole alienation of Oxford is based on that little saloon bar scene," says Harris. "You're either part of the Little Clarendon Street crowd or the Jericho crowd and never the twain shall meet. I think Creep was about some girl who used to frequent the Little Clarendon Street side of things and Thom thought he'd never have anything to do with that, hence 'What the hell am I doing here, I don't belong here'."**

The single sessions became arduous; no-one liked what was going down on tape. Having relinquished the production role, Hufford was particularly irked: "It was overblown bombastic rock." To raise everyone's spirits, Kolderie suggested they try putting down "that Scott Walker song". The band recorded one take of it. "At the end," remembers Kolderie, "everyone in the place was silent for a moment and then they burst into applause. I'd never had that happen before. I called Keith and said, Maybe you should come down. So he drove to Oxford that night, listened to it three times, and said, 'Hmmm...' and a couple of weeks later he called me and told us to work on it some more."

Legend has it that the band weren't unanimously keen on Creep. Jonny's famous guitar crunches were supposedly an attempt to ruin a song he didn't like. "Jonny played the piano at the end and it was gorgeous," notes Kolderie. "Everyone who heard Creep just started going insane. So that's what got us the job doing the album."

*Pablo Honey* was completed in three weeks. "It was a bit of a struggle," admits Kolderie. "It was their first record and they wanted to be The Beatles, and the mix had to have no reverb, and they had all the ideas they'd ever come up with in 20 years of listening to records. But we managed to get it done." Next came a tour supporting Kingmaker. (Radiohead came on before a juggler.) Creep was released to coincide in September 1992, while *Pablo Honey* was scheduled for the new year. Both bands then performed at that September's EMI UK conference:



**Full Name:**  
Philip James  
Selway  
**Date Of Birth:**  
May 23, 1967  
**Instrument:**  
Drums.  
**Education:**

School; studied English and history at Liverpool Polytechnic.

**Previous jobs:** Drumming in pit bands for touring musicals; sub-editor; TEFL teacher.

**Five key words:** Quiet, bold, "put" sensuous, well-dressed".

**Favourite music:**  
(Past influences) The Beat, Joy Division, The Ruts.  
(Current faves) Teenage Fanclub, Tricky, Supergrass, Captain Beefheart.

**Notes:** Often said to be the band's emotional anchor. So mild-mannered he's known

as Mod Dog. The band claim they wind-up new engineers and producers by telling them to watch out for Phil's temper. Married to Kate. Quite likes fish. Really likes vodka and tonic.

**Stuff he's said:** Not much.  
**What the others have said about him:** "He's the one who least likes the idea of the band as a gang." (Ed) "Can you play a bit faster?" (Thom). "He's been attending drum'n'bass nights." (Colin) "He'll not impose his mood upon you like some members of the band." (Ed)

**Full Name:**  
Colin Charles  
Greenwood  
**Date Of Birth:**  
June 26, 1969  
**Instrument:**  
Bass.  
**Education:**

Abingdon



School; read English literature at Cambridge.

**Previous jobs:** Ents officer at Peterhouse, Cambridge; assistant at Our Price, Oxford.

**Five key words:** Garrulous, funny, bookish, can't drive.

**Favourite music:** (Post influences) Talking Heads, The Fall, R.E.M., Tom Waits. (Current faves) Ennio Morricone, Prince Buster, Lee Scratch Perry.

**Notes:** Known as Coz. Could talk the hind legs off the Household Cavalry.

**Stuff he's said:** "Why can't I get a shag?" "There's a literary analogy for that." "What I really hated about Britpop was all that tiresome irony. As if bands shouldn't be serious things." "I tend to play better in the studio, no pressures, just sheer volume and alcohol."

**What the others have said**

speeches and annual reports by day, hair down and rugs up by night, to the sound of the label's latest acquisitions. Impress the right people and they'll be inspired to work hard on your behalf.

Cue Carol Baxter, of EMI's international office, the department responsible for ensuring that EMI's overseas branches release and promote British signings. "I know nothing about instruments or drum riffs, or what have you, but this funny little band came on and they obviously had something. This was a hideous record company do but Thom gave it everything." Baxter, tired of the 'priority acts' of the '80s had been considering leaving the job. "I sat there thinking, I'm not going to leave: I want Radiohead on my roster! I bumped into Colin and Thom in the corridor after their performance and I thought they were junkies. Bloody druggies sitting there in the corridor looking so pale. I asked Thom if he was all right. He said he was. So I asked if they wanted a drink and all they wanted was a glass of Coca-Cola. I bought that for them and we got talking, and I found out they were from Abingdon which is where I'm from." Baxter began introducing the world to the charms of Radiohead.

Creep came out to an audible shrug; one or two good reviews, almost no airplay and just enough sales (about 6,000) to get it to Number 78 in the UK charts.

Hufford claims he wasn't too disappointed. "Bryce and I have always tried to be realistic. We hoped, as you do, that Creep would be a bigger hit, but at the same time it fitted in with our concept of where to be at that moment. A giant leap isn't actually healthy for a band, it needs to grow and understand naturally how things work."

One unwelcome lesson arrived with the Christmas 1992 issue of NME. The band's first illustrated review of a headlining gig (at London's Smashed Club) was an absolute stinker. Above four of the least flattering pictures of Thom Yorke ever printed (Caption: 'UGLY-OH YEAH! Radiohead Thom gurns his living') ran four scathing paragraphs dismissing their music, sneering at their audience, calling the band "mannered beyond belief" and ending on the declaration: "Radiohead are a pitiful, lily-livered excuse for a rock'n'roll group."

The review launched an uneasy relationship with the music press. When *Pablo Honey* finally appeared, the inkies were too busy singing the praises of such hot tips as The Auteurs to give it much of a fanfare. A small Melody Maker feature coinciding with the album and third single, Anyone Can Play Guitar, depicts the group running away in a fit of embarrassed giggles when they see someone approach wearing a Radiohead T-shirt. When asked if he's interested in being a pop star, Thom scoffs. "Nah. Look at us. We're a lily-livered excuse for a rock group. We might as well accept the truth and carry on."

Meanwhile, unbeknown to the band, a radio station in San Francisco had just named Creep its favourite record of the year.

**about him:** "Here's a tip: don't believe a thing he says." (Ed) "Likes a drink." (Phil) "He's very strong-minded and astute." (Thom) "He's downloaded a library." (Thom)



**Full Name:**  
Jonathan  
Greenwood  
**Date Of Birth:**  
November 5,  
1971  
**Instrument:**

How long have you got?

**Education:** Abingdon School; began course in psychology at Oxford Poly.

**Previous jobs:** Went straight into band.

**Five key words:** Funny, erudite, impatient,分裂, fringe.

**Favourite music:** (Past influences) Jazz, Miles Davis, Elvis Costello.

(Current faves) Mo' Wax, Can, Pink Floyd's Meddle.

**Notes:** Hardly drinks, occasionally drugs. Married. Known as "the dreamer" at school. Likes buying clothes. Wrote The Tourist, the final track on *OK Computer*.

**Stuff he's said:** "Playing bridge goes very well with drugs."

**What the others have said about him:** "He's got an environmentally-friendly stunt kite!" (Colin) "He likes having as many instruments as possible in his corner." (Thom) "Jonny made us all watch Pink Floyd At Pompeii and said, This is how we should do videos." (Colin)

"He's completely colourblind. Apparently when they were kids Colin used to change the paints around in their paint boxes and Jonny would end up with all these disturbing pictures." (Phil)

LIVE 105 IN SAN FRANCISCO WAS ONE OF A STRING OF Angophile '80s West Coast radio stations that abetted the American rise of such poptastic delights as Duran Duran, Depeche Mode and A Flock Of Seagulls. One of its presenters had found Creep on import and aired it regularly after an extraordinary phone-in reaction. The song topped the station's year-end poll and quickly crossed over onto LA's KROQ and other West Coast stations.

EMI's American labels realised they had a potential hit. "When you're trying to develop a new band overseas," says Carol Baxter, "the main thing you're going to hear from outside territories is, 'What's the band doing in their own market?' They don't think there's any point picking up a band unless it's already a hit somewhere. But Creep broke in Israel first. South-east Asia took an interest early on too. Finally, Rob Gordon in Capitol's marketing department became passionate about it."

Suddenly, the realities of being in a breaking band were made clear to Radiohead. Baxter recalls a nightmarish US promotional visit. "8am – breakfast with this executive, 1pm – lunch with 55 retailers, solid press interviews in between, 7pm – dinner with this many journalists and, by the way, can you do a live radio phone-in at 2am? It was a 16-18 hour day with no breaks. I couldn't handle that. But they managed it. I was sitting there going grey thinking, I'll never make my bands do this again."

"When Creep went through the roof, Capitol just wanted to milk it," says Kolderie. "They were doing I'M A CREEP contests and placing ads that said BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD SAY THEY DON'T SUCK. I remember Bryce saying, 'This is horrible, it's looking like a one-hit wonder unless we can save this baby.'" The single eventually peaked at a modest 34 in the US, but *Pablo Honey* went gold. Exactly a year after its original release, a reissued Creep finally hit the UK charts, peaking at Number 7.

IN THE US, CAPITOL WERE KEEN TO BUILD ON THE MOMENTUM. Getting Radiohead to support label-mates Duran Duran, poised to tour the arenas on the strength of their comeback smash Ordinary World, looked ideal exposure. Despite heavy pressure from the suits,

duced by John Leckie – hired on the strength of his work with The Stone Roses and Radiohead faves Magazine and XTC. Leckie was excited by the singing and the three-guitar line-up but wasn't a fan of *Pablo Honey* ("Too noisy"). "I liked the straightforwardness of the demos, though," he says, "and I thought, This could be easy!"

IT WASN'T. THE EDIFICE MARKED "FOLLOW-UP TO CREEP" cast a long shadow over the sessions. "It was either going to be Sulk, The Bends, Nice Dream, or Just," Leckie remembers. "We had to give those absolute attention, make them amazing, instant smash hits, Number 1 in America. Everyone was pulling their hair out saying, 'It's not good enough! We were trying too hard."

"There were pressures on deadline," admits Keith Wozencroft. "But accidentally. We'd all sat round saying, In an ideal world what would be good? Setting a rough agenda. But being a young band they took that seriously; they were very keen to achieve the best scenario."

"There was a lot of 'Jonny's got to have a really special sound,'" Leckie remembers. "I said, He's got one already, but we spent days hiring in different amplifiers and weird guitars for him. In the end he used what he'd been using for the last couple of years and I just recorded it straight."

Also on those first sessions at RAK studios was a young engineer named Nigel Godrich. "I had a great time," he laughs, "but I know they felt under pressure. Remember, they were still relatively inexperienced in the studio and Thom, especially, found the studio environment difficult, not the best place for being creative in the way he is. But the tension can lead to things happening. It's an interesting process but it can be quite a painful one"

"You have to go through pains to make great records," states Leckie. "Either sweat it or take loads of drugs! Nigel and I had a great time and [the band] didn't. They'd often go off for meetings, huddling together in the other room. Perhaps they suddenly realised this is what they'd be doing with their lives: 'I didn't mean to be in the same room as you for the next ten years!'"

## "THEY SUDDENLY REALISED THIS IS WHAT THEY'D BE DOING WITH THEIR LIVES: 'I DIDN'T MEAN TO BE IN

Chris Hufford decided the band were better off cutting their teeth more modestly – and more credibly – in support of Belly. That tour marked the start of an extended period of tension on Planet Radiohead. Thom spent a significant chunk of his life fielding endless, repetitive questioning from American journalists about the extent of his creepiness and whether he'd had a difficult childhood. ("Not as tough as my adulthood's turning out, thanks.") Grinding out performances of songs they were bored by, and promoting an album they barely liked began to take its toll on the band's unity. The glare of the American media also forced them into rash decisions they later regretted. A glammed-up and heavily styled Thom appeared in a magazine advertisement for Iceberg jeans. They shot a fashion spread for Interview magazine. Thom affected hair extensions. Because the album kept on breaking around the world, the *Pablo Honey* tour lumbered into its second year.

"They were finding the process very stressful and alien and not what they were in it for," remarks their agent Charlie Myatt. "The main crisis was coming off the Belly tour. They were supposed to go straight onto a tour of Europe with James, and there was a lot of soul-searching about why they were in a group at all."

"We joined this band to write songs and be musicians," said Jonny. "But we spent a year being jukeboxes instead. We felt in a creative stasis because we couldn't release anything new."

After much discussion they opted to do the James tour. "They played like demons all the way through," says Myatt. "They got a huge reaction in Spain and Portugal – those Catholic countries getting into Creep!"

The tension lingered into the recording of the second album, pro-

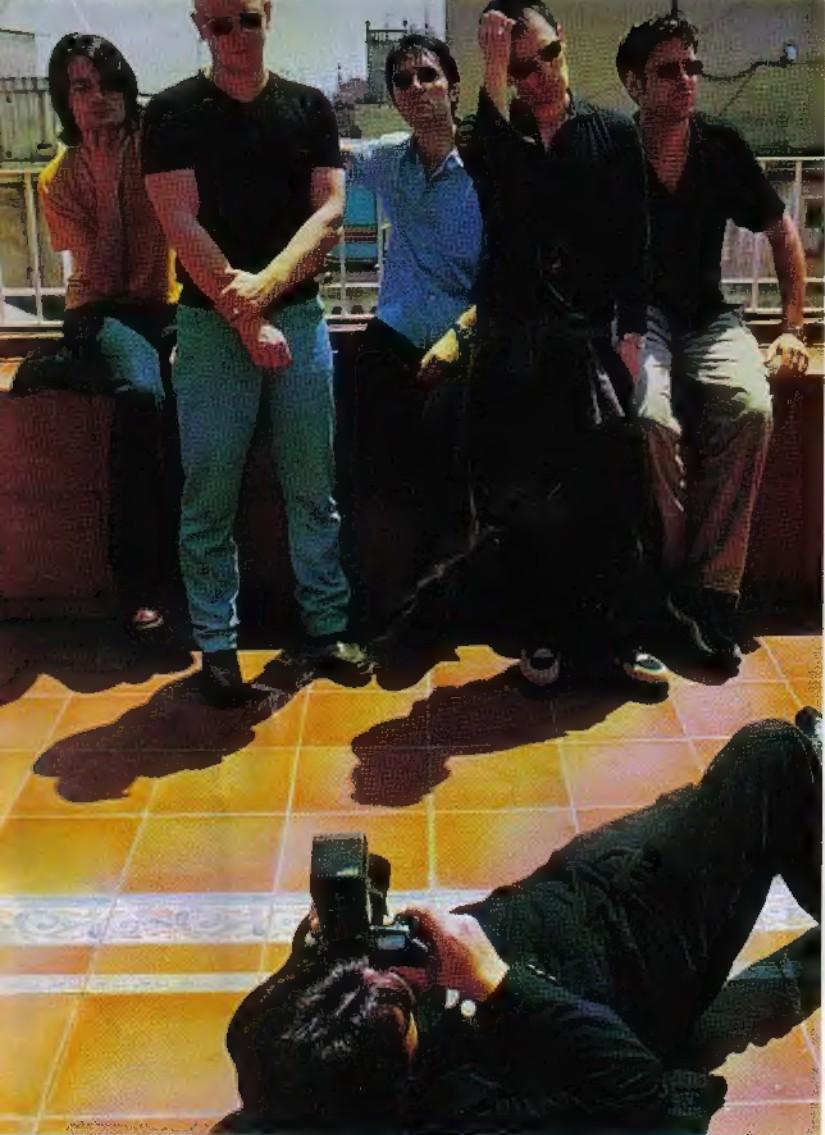
"I had this profound fear of having so much to prove," Thom later admitted. "We knew we had to do something brilliant, and knew that we could; it was just, Is it going to happen?"

"That was certainly the lowest point I've had in my relationship with Thom and I'm sure vice versa," recalls Chris Hufford thoughtfully. "Thom became totally confused about what he wanted to do, what he was doing in a band and in his life, and that turned into a mistrust of everybody else. I came very close to saying, I can't be fucked with this any more. I can't be doing with all this hassle; it's just not worth it. Thankfully, just prior to me – and Thom – really snapping, it suddenly turned round."

THE SOLUTION WAS A CHANGE OF SCENERY. RADIOHEAD quit the studio and toured Australasia and the Far East. "It made them re-evaluate what they were good at and enjoyed doing," claims Hufford. "Playing live again put the perspective back on what they'd lost in the studio. Suddenly there was a direction." Having worked the songs in on the road, they returned to Britain and completed the album in a fortnight.

"My understanding of Radiohead definitely improved from that point," Hufford concludes. "I stopped talking about product and units and realised that all that didn't matter. Just make the record you want and then see how it fits into the scheme of things."

Nevertheless, there remained a good deal of trepidation about following Creep. Released while *The Bends* was still being completed, the first single from the album, *My Iron Lung* (taken from a live TV show recorded at London's Astoria), peaked at a disappointing 23. It wouldn't be until the fifth single from the album, *Street Spirit*, 18



The Radiohead promotional circus in Barcelona, May 23, 1997.

of working. They liked the simple way they'd recorded *Black Star* (on *The Bends*) and *Lucky* (for the Bosnian charity album *HELP*) with engineer Nigel Godrich and asked him to build and man a mobile studio for them. Work began at

The Fruit Farm, a converted apple store the band use as rehearsal space, then moved on to Jane Seymour's Elizabethan mansion outside Bath (features include terraced gardens, full-sized ballroom, and framed photos of Jane in her undies in the bathrooms). With just the band, Godrich and a cook present in the rambling property they found it intimidating to begin with. "But," says Godrich. "we made it our own and developed this real sense of freedom. We could play croquet in the middle of the night if we wanted!"

Having learnt from *The Bends*, they decided to break the songs in live before completing the record. "Radiohead have displayed a dogged determination to come and tour America and tour America and tour America," says Paul Q. Kolderie. "And not only that, but do all the stuff you have to do, go to those retail dinners and so on. Thom would sometimes make a bit of a scene, and he wouldn't always be there, but they've really made the effort to make friends in the industry. And that reflects a conscious strategy on the part of Chris Hufford and Bryce Edge."

Between the release of *The Bends* in March 1995 and the completion of *OK Computer* earlier this year, Radiohead toured America no less than five times. Hufford and Edge have followed the approach of Miles Copeland with The Police and Paul McGuinness with U2: keep coming back, slogging your way through the boondocks and college towns, and America will be yours. Says Ed O'Brien: "Because they became so huge in Britain very quickly, bands like Happy Mondays and Stone Roses came to America with completely the wrong attitude. You have to keep touring." Jonny Greenwood agrees: "There are lots of double standards with British bands when they talk about America. They like to talk badly about it, yet they want to conquer it. We're in awe of America."

Radiohead's new material was premiered on a 13-date American tour supporting Alanis Morissette. Capitol were delighted with what they were hearing. In those surroundings, new songs like *Electioneering* sounded like anthemic US radio hits. They began to pump up the idea of Radiohead as saviours of stadium rock. "[Capitol] thought, This album is going to be chock-a-block with radiotastic singles and we'll

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months later, that Radiohead would hit the UK Top 10 again. America was even more resistant. "People didn't know who Radiohead was but they knew who Creep was," notes Hufford ruefully. The reaction to *The Bends* in the US was favourable but unspectacular, yet it grew from a street and college level to sell well, and steadily, ever since.

"*The Bends* was neither an English album nor an American album," decides Paul Kolderie. "It's an album made in the void of touring and travelling. It really had that feeling of, 'We don't live anywhere and we don't belong anywhere'."

"Spending two years playing the same record and visiting so many places... a very strange experience," says Colin. "And the novelty can carry it over for so long, until the novelty itself becomes everyday – which is really weird."

"There's a sense of limbo that's really inspiring," says Thom. "Everything's taken care of for you, and you become a functioning organism only when someone plugs you in. It's also very lonely – but again that's inspiring. Because everything that happens becomes so acutely important. You're in a white room and there's only one window and whatever goes past that window takes up your whole existence. I think we've always worked best in isolation. So there's this sense on the one hand of being exposed to lots of different stuff and on the other being in forced isolation to consider it."

IT WAS THIS ATMOSPHERE OF DISLOCATION AND TRANSCIENCE that would permeate their next songs. Recorded over a year, *OK Computer* became another extended struggle to perfect their methods

just have it away majorly," laughs Hufford. "But when the record was finished, *Electioneering* ended up being this very abrasive, garagery thing and the other songs [the label] had liked didn't even make it to the album. There was lots of 'Ooh dear, this isn't quite what we thought the record was going to be, I have to say we're a bit disappointed.' But by that time the UK had grabbed it and said, 'This is fucking awesome!' So we steamed in and said to America, 'Get your industry heads off, forget the bloody singles, just listen to it like a punter for a few weeks and you'll realise what an amazing piece of work it is.' Thankfully, that's what happened. They started saying, 'You're right, this is amazing, but now what the fuck do we do with it?!"'

FRIDAY MAY 23, 1997, BARCELONA. ANOTHER DAY OF promotion. The band assemble in a large suite at the Meridian Hotel to face today's five-page itinerary of tasks. At 11am Thom is talking to French magazine Rock & Folk while Jonny meets Christian Fuchs from Austrian radio, Phil's doing a Belgian newspaper, Ed and Colin are being interviewed by Austrian magazines. After lunch, while the others record a bunch of TV slots, Ed will be chatting to someone from the German station amusingly known as Radio Fritz.

In the afternoon, a cluster of German journalists arrive to find that celebrations for Phil Selway's 30th birthday are taking place. The EMI posse have purchased a cake and Phil personally hands a slice to each of the patiently queuing media-folk. A TV crew is filming another TV crew filming a press interview. A photographer is taking pictures of all the photographers taking pictures.



By the time MOJO's turn comes (we're booked in at 18.45) everyone's looking a bit frazzled. In the suite that acts as the Radiohead HQ, Chris Hufford is rolling a restorative spliff and fielding calls on his mobile, making plans with partner Bryce Edge – in another part of town – to dine with some very senior EMI mandarins the following week. As soon as the call is over, Hufford's mobile goes again.

Carol Baxter, nursing a large gin and tonic, tells me about a Japanese "Phil Is Great" fan club, a curious clique of female EMI Japan employees entirely devoted to being nice to Radiohead's drummer. At their meetings they serve Phil his favourite foods, then play bingo. Worried about offending the rest of the band, the club has elected to close itself.

The schedule is running almost an hour late. Thom's still in with a Swede. Chris is concerned that his charge may be fried. "What time are you leaving tomorrow?" he asks MOJO ominously. Yorke emerges just before 8pm with a thousand-yard stare. Chris gets him into a huddle to discuss what he'd like to do about the MOJO interview. There's an intriguing frisson to their conflag, the coming together of mentor and meal-ticket. Yorke's shattered, he'd like to talk to MOJO but would also like to go off-duty some time before midnight. He needs to freshen up, he says. I suggest a quick turn on the bidet. Yorke has a short, explosive laugh. His manager decides to finish their discussions out of earshot. We'll repair to the band's hotel while Chris and Thom confer in a separate cab.

The Claris is the Starship Enterprise with en-suite bathrooms. Its plush, space-age ambience seems entirely apt for Radiohead. As we climb the walls in an external elevator pod, Thom points out the absurd phallic symbols languishing in a modernistic pond below. In the rooms, he says, are crazy Bang & Olufsen TVs that come out of the wall and



**Left, Radiohead at Glastonbury '94 and (above) their uneasy headlining triumph at Glastonbury '97. "A fucking nightmare to be frank," says manager Chris Hufford.**

look at you when you turn them on. We gate-crash some sort of reception in the roof-garden and Thom settles himself on a pine lounger by the tiny pool. Considering the kind of day he's had at the rock face he's in good spirits. He laughs easily and his voice shows little sign of fatigue.

So, Thom, were you happy with last night's show?  
"Yeah! Fuck."

You said on-stage that you were really nervous.

"All the way through, yeah, every note. It's been a long time and all the stuff going on around us is really, really frightening and just trying to keep your head... I'm glad we did. All I know is the feeling afterwards of calm for the first time in month... Which of course has been completely fucked-over today." He rolls his eyes and laughs.

We talk at length about the making of *OK Computer* and its themes (see MOJO 44). He explains how he attempted to make each vocal different, talks about the singers he admires (Elvis Costello, Scott Walker, BJ Harvey) and how he wanted the lyrics on this album to be reportage in the manner of The Beatles' *Day In The Life*. We talk about the impending headlining gig at Glastonbury – the biggest British show of their career – one their agent has been negotiating for a year.

"We're just providing the music," he says, putting his face in his hands. "Hi everyone! We're here to play some music for an hour and a half... That's it."

As I wind the interview down he suddenly says, "I'm really shaking now," and looks distressed. If it's an act it's a convincing one. We bid him goodnight and he returns to the bar to join the rest of his band.

"THE REASON A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE EXCITED ABOUT OK Computer is that Modern Rock could do with a saviour, there's no doubt about that," says Nic Harcourt, programming director at radio station WDST in Woodstock, New York. With recent relative flops in the US from such hitherto blue-chip acts as R.E.M. (Warner Bros' big hitter), U2 (Polygram), Pearl Jam and Aerosmith (Sony), the record industry's trepidation about big rock bankers is tempered by the belief that the market is there for the taking by an act who can capture the public imagination. Capitol believes it has that act. "Radiohead's critical credibility here has been building for a little while," says Roy Trakin, Senior Editor at LA-based industry weekly *Hits*. "There was a little bit of underrating to start with, but their reputation over in England has reached these shores now. It all culminated with Capitol beating the drums on this record, to the extent of sending out Aiwa Walkmans with tapes of the album sealed inside them. That infuriated some people, but it seemed to actually get them to listen to the thing. And the press has pretty much fallen in line."

American reviews for *OK Computer* have indeed been adulterous, and virtually across the board. "*OK Computer* is evidence that Radiohead are one rock band still willing to look the devil square in the eyes," concluded Rolling Stone's four-star review. Robert Hilburn of the Los Angeles Times has included the album in his list of the year's ten best so far. Spin, *Request* and *Details* have all drooled.

As we go to press *OK Computer* is at Number 41 on the Billboard 200, having entered two weeks ago at 21, a slightly disappointing showing when you consider that The Prodigy's *Fat Of The Land* crashed straight in at Number 1 that same week. It's certainly an improvement on *The Bends*, which stalled at Number 88, but it's not quite what Capitol hoped for. As for Let Down, its second week at radio has also been a slight, er, let-down.

"To be perfectly honest, I think the jury's still out on this record in terms of radio," says Harcourt. Indeed, Lisa Worden, programming director at hugely influential KROQ in LA, says the station loves Radiohead but confesses that, "I don't know yet if I hear any radio smashes."

"There are tendencies I don't like, such as Thom's tendency not to enunciate the lyrics properly – when I first heard the album I thought it was a little self-indulgent, but then, as the complexity of it revealed itself to me, I realised that it's really well put together," says Paul Kolderie. "I think this music has a lot of beauty in it, a spiritual quality, and that's what people are grabbing on to. In terms of the band's commercial future, the negative factor is that Thom is going to shoot himself in the foot, although none of the others will. The positive factor is what they've got up their sleeves in terms of music – they have three or four smashes that they're waiting for the next record to put out. The real breakthrough will come with the next one, and I think it'll come out a lot quicker than you think."

"There's nothing I've seen in any country in the world that's excited me as much live," says Capitol's president Gary Gersh. "There isn't a better singer than Thom Yorke. Jonny is as exciting a guitar player as anyone alive. Our job is just to take them as a left-of-centre band and bring the centre to them. That's our focus, and we won't let up until they are the biggest band in the world."

Significantly, the group chose to lob a small spanner in the works when they guested on *The Tonight Show* on July 25, the night before starting their US tour in Los Angeles. Where the sensible thing would have been to play Let Down, or one of the other, more accessible tracks on *OK Computer*, Radiohead opted to go the Oasis route and hit Middle

America with a particularly snotty and abrasive version of Electioneering. Watching Thom Yorke slashing at a guitar bearing the message "Protect Choice", it seemed as if he couldn't bear to be seen to be wooing America too overtly.

IF YOU WERE STANDING IN THE MUD ON THE NIGHT Radiohead played Glastonbury, the chances are you felt good about it. "They took the stage at a moment when the festival had become an exercise in grimly telling yourself you were having fun," says MOJO staffer Paul Trynka. "Within seconds, it became obvious that something special was happening. All the songs which might seem to flirt dangerously with prog on record seemed transformed: introverted, me-against-the-world diatribes turned into expansive, joyful anthems."

"It was a fucking nightmare to be perfectly frank," says Hufford, who was standing at the side of the stage with his young daughter. "For the first few songs it was unbelievable, the lights, the roar of the crowd. And they were playing brilliantly. Then it all started going horribly sour."

Keith Wozencroft was in the crowd with his girlfriend. "I was laughing for the first two songs, it was unbelievable. I couldn't quite deal with it. It was surreal for me, a bit of an old hippy from Gloucester, who went pretty much every year to Glastonbury to see Hawkwind, Gong or Taj Mahal. So to be there and see the band I'd worked with headlining was fantastic, hilarious. Hearing people behind me singing along and listening to what they were saying. Then I couldn't enjoy it. When they went into Talk Show Host I knew they were in trouble."

"Thom's monitors went off after the second song and he couldn't hear a thing," says Hufford. "On Talk Show Host he lost his cues and fucked up completely. It bumbled to a halt and I could tell he was close to walking off then."

"I thought it was stunning," says Charlie Myatt, ankle-deep in mud just to the left of the mixing desk. "I was next to some mad guy from Liverpool who'd come all the way down just to see Radiohead and was off his trolley and word-perfect all the way through."

"For the rest of the set," says Wozencroft, "I was irritating my girlfriend saying, Is it all right? Something's happened to the monitors. Oh shit, Thom's upset. And she's like, 'Shut the fuck up.' So I walked further back and realised the audience was transfixed and that was really exhilarating. I thought it must be like me seeing Queen doing Bohemian Rhapsody in 1975 – a bit of history."

"Jonny's guitar playing was literally terrifying," says Trynka. "As he hit the wrenching chords in Paranoid Android that signal the full-blown riff, several people in the audience around me literally flipped, just spun into the mud with pleasure."

On-stage, things were deteriorating. Intermittently, the monitors would surge back into life for a brief, deafening moment. "The whole world started crashing down on me and I'm sure on Thom," says Hufford. "But they ploughed on through to the end. From

Thom's perspective it was one of the worst gigs of his life. But then at the end, seeing the crowd's reaction, they'd obviously had it away."

Paul Trynka: "Just after Radiohead went off-stage I bumped into a friend I'd been trying to find for hours. We were both in some kind of altered state; all we could say was, Did you see that?"

When I've talked to people since who witnessed that performance, it's been galling to hear the odd person describe it as merely 'a good gig'. It wasn't. It was something far more profound."

"This was their biggest moment in the UK and they did the business, but they just couldn't enjoy the moment," says Hufford, shaking his head. "The old Karma Police operate in a very queer way – you're never too big for a kicking!"

*US material by Barney Hoskyns*

